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ABSTRACT

This paper provides guidelines and exercises designed for a three-day seminar to encourage effective journalistic writing. Among the topics discussed are communication theory, general rules in writing, the news story, editing, the feature story, interviews, and headlines. Appendixes include an Associated Press style-guide exercise, news and feature story fact sheets, and a bibliography. (KS)

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U.S. CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION

Professional Journalism Skills

CS 203 390

CHICAGO REGIONAL TRAINING CENTER

COMMUNICATIONS & OFFICE SKILLS INSTITUTE

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GENERAL OBJECTIVES

The three-day seminar's aim is not to present rigid rules to be followed blindly, but to make the participant aware of good journalistic writing and its characteristics. Effective writing is simple, short, and clear. This is especially true of good journalism. The news story is constructed so that the average reader will understand and remember it.

The course is composed of lecture, writing, and evaluation of participants' writing. Exercises will be graded by the participants. Written assignments are evaluated in class by the instructor with the use of an opaque projector so that the class may also contribute helpful suggestions.

Stress is made on writing the lead, organizing the news and feature story, and editing your own copy.

The first day concerns itself with basics of good writing. Much time is spent on writing and evaluating the leads of news stories. The latter part of the first day covers writing the news story.

The second day begins with an evaluation of the news stories written the day before. Further lecture covers editing and the feature story. Feature leads will be written and evaluated. Then a feature story will be written.

The third day begins with evaluating the feature story and further practice in organizing material for presentation in news and feature stories. Writing captions for photographs and headline writing are also covered.

A review of the critical bibliography concludes the course.

BASIC COMMUNICATION THEORY

It is extremely important to understand what the communication process is all about. The theory explains it is process whereby a sender (with an idea or message) transmits that message to a receiver. But the process does not end here.

Instructor's Manual: The communication process is composed of several elements:

Message — Understand Message

Sender----Transmitted via a media-------Receiver (Target Audience)

Message must be encoded before transmittal

Writing
TV
Movies
Record
Tape
Talking
etc.

Message must be decoded before understood by receiver

Note: The process does not end here. The above is not communication. You only have communication when the receiver returns feedback to the sender. If there is no feedback, there is no communication. Communication is a close linked reciprocal process that is going on all the time. It is not talking at someone or group of someones. It is talking <u>with</u> someone.

Receiver of Message---Sends Back Feedback---Transmit---To Sender of Original Message

All disruptions to this process are termed "noise". These disruptions are not just audible noise although that is certainly one form of noise. The noise may be visual or just a disruptive climate for the communications.

A good communicator will modify the nessage on the basis of the feedback--or lack of feedback received.

The above is extremely important introductory material to this course.

Good writing is a result of good planning. Stream of consciousness writing is not designed for journalism since it does not communicate. Rather it serves to give us insights into an author's mind and emotions.

Therefore good planning is a necessity in writing a news or featurized news story. A list of facts helps. An outline is even better. You must apply the grid of the Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How; and you must answer those questions. Naturally, they need not all be answered in the lead.

Analysis of the facts at hand, which is the result of research, interviews, your own knowledge, fact sheets and other sources, is the first step before you can plan your story.

Then much thought must be directed toward selecting the one fact or approach that will most effectively get your reader into the story.

Often writers urge other writers to spend 75 per cent of their time planning, researching, and writing the lead. Then the rest of the story will generally fall into place if you have selected a good lead.

Often the lead is one of the facts from your list of facts. At other times it is several facts welded together in a punchy sentence designed to grab your reader or transmit a miximum amount of information in a minimum amount of words. It can be a question; it may be a summary of facts; it can be a quote; it may be a statement . . . in fact, it can be a combination of all of these and others.

What must be in the lead is the most important -- in terms of newsworthiness -- item from your list of facts. The rest of the facts in the story should support and/or supplement it, but never supersede it.

THE READABLE SENTENCE

Good writing is lean, tight writing. It is sparse writing. In terms of understandability, fewer words is better than more words. To write lean you must think and plan your writing. You must know what you want to say, say it, and then get on to your next subject. Bad writing is a good example of thinking that has been too short.

Shorter sentences are generally easier to read and communicate more meaning to your reader. They also have more impact than longer sentences. However, it must be noted that writing which has all short sentences tends to read like punchy news briefs from the late Walter Winchell. You must always balance your writing.

When you discover you have written a long sentence, begin by breaking it up; reassemble the sentence--now possibly sentences--so that each main idea has its own structure. Then cut all unnecessary words from your copy. You must ensure, however, that the meaning has not been altered and that your reader will understand the meaning.

THE PARAGRAPH

The paragraph is the building-block of any piece of expository writing. A sentence, standing alone, may be incomplete or unclear; the well-written paragraph will communicate an idea with thoroughness and completeness.

A good paragraph centers on one thought. Usually that thought is expressed in a topic sentence. It is the one sentence, usually at the beginning of the paragraph, which most clearly summarizes the paragraph.

In theory the writer may place the topic sentence at the beginning, the end, or anywhere in the paragraph. He may omit it entirely, assuming that the paragraph is so well written the reader will have no trouble getting its point. But in practice he or she will do best to place the topic sentence most often at the beginning of the paragraph, and occasionally at the end.

If placed at the beginning, the remainder of the paragraph should support and explain it. If at the end, the rest of the paragraph should build up to it.

ACTIVE VS. PASSIVE

In normal English word order, something does something. That is the active form. The actor (subject) is identified.

Often this order is inverted, and the subject is acted upon. Something is done by something. That is the passive form. The real actor is not always identified.

Instead of writing "I disliked the play" a critic might write "The play was disliked." The critic could add "by me" to clarify the thought, but if he does he has succeeded in constructing a complex and awkward way to express a simple idea.

What if he does not add "by me"? Then by whom? The audience? All critics? The actors themselves? The sentence becomes more than awkward; it becomes confusing.

Although it has its place in writing, the passive form is essentially a weaker form of expression. It lacks the vigor of the active form; too much use of it leads to weak and often ambiguous writing.

Sometimes people use it out of a mistaken sense of modesty (The play was disliked), leaving themselves out of the idea. Sometimes people use it because they do not really know who has performed the action, or are unwilling to say who is responsible.

"Mr. X's campaign was conceded to have started well, but he was believed to have been outmaneuvered and outgeneraled long before the election. His television appearances were said to have been poorly planned and badly done and his news conferences were called a disaster."

SIMPLE IS BEST

You must call a spade a spade. Use fire and not conflagration. Use complete, not finalize. Use get, not procure. Your readers will understand simple language more easily and you will be eliminating possible confusion in your writing. See the following list:

COLUMN I	COLUMN II
construct, fabricate	make
accomplish, perform	do
initiate, commence, inaugurate	begin
therefore	so
nevertheless	but
terminate, conclude, finalize	end
utilize	use
deem	think
assistance	help
substantial portion	large part
reside, dwell	live
stated	said
ascertain	learn, find out
afford an opportunity	allow
procure	get

WORD ECONOMY

An extremely common fault in all writing is to smother your reader with words. If you must make the reader work hard to discover what you are trying to communicate, you are subscribing to the belief that more is better than less. It is not!

Good writing is terse, lean and unobstructed by unnecessary phrases, adjectives or explanations not pertinent to your message.

QUIZ A

Underline unnecessary words in each of the following:

1. The assignment came at a time when we were busy.
2. Our products depreciate in value slowly.
3. During the year of 1975.
4. It will cost the sum of $99.
5. In about two weeks' time.
6. The car sells for a price of $12,000.
7. In the city of Cleveland.
8. Perhaps it may be that the price is too high.
9. The boat is made out of wood.

YOU DON'T NEED THE DOUBLET

You have heard of the double negative that makes a positive statement; you may not have heard of the doublet. Doublets are phrases that say the same thing twice. For example: Final completion. Completion must be final or it's not complete.

While it is often important to repeat an instruction to a subordinate, or at least have him or her repeat the instructions to you, the doublet does not add emphasis to your writing. Rather the second word or phrase dilutes the meaning of the first.

QUIZ B

Underline the doublets following (and in this sentence as well) and circle the one you would omit and eliminate.

1. The co-signer assumes obligation and responsibility.

2. You have our sincere and earnest wishes.

3. First and foremost, we must have a good and effective meeting.

4. It proved to be the right and proper solution.

5. They could decline or refuse the invitation.

6. That is an unfair and unjust accusation.

7. Please reply to this letter at once by return mail.

THE NEWS STORY

1. It should be recent, free from the opinion of the writer, and concentrate on the facts.

2. It should be accurate, balanced, objective, concise, and clear.

3. Facts should be made interesting by stressing nearness, prominence, importance, unusualness, progress, emotion, and conflict.

4. Information should be attributed to an authority or a major person involved in the story.

CLEAR NEWS WRITING TIPS

1. Start with the most important or interesting ideas first.

2. Avoid long sentences.

3. Keep paragraphs short.

4. Cut gobbledegook and cliches.

5. Be simple, direct, and specific, but not blunt.

6. Use a variety of sentences, words, and paragraphs.

7. Use active verbs -- avoid the passive voice.

8. Be objective, but avoid being stuffy.

WRITING THE NEWS STORY

Everybody has to start somewhere to learn to write a news story. A copy boy works on a paper running errands and doing other menial jobs until someone gives him the chance to write a story.

Then when given the chance he often doesn't know where to begin. So let us begin with the basic rules of news stories.

You must answer the following questions in each news story: Who? What? When? Why? Where? and How? Do not be obsessed, however, with answering them all in your lead paragraph or paragraphs, but they must be answered by the end of the story to resolve the questions a reader is likely to have on his or her mind.

MECHANICS - BEFORE WRITING

Before you begin the actual writing, here are a few things to do:

1. Get a good typewriter. Write all news stories -- feature stories as well -- on a typewriter. If you don't know how to type then the final product must be transcribed from your handwriting or tape recordings before it can be sent in a news release form.

2. Use white paper, preferably unruled, size 8½x11.

3. Type on only one side of the paper and label each sheet with a story title. This can be very brief -- we call it a slug line. For example, if you are writing a story about two employees who saved a woman from a burning automobile, your slug line could be "Car Rescue."

4. Use wide margins to have room for notes, corrections and marking copy.

5. Copy means story material in journalism jargon. Double or triple space all your copy. This spacing allows you to make corrections or additions easily.

6. Have any photographs that will illustrate your story at hand, as well as an idea of how you intend to arrange the material. You also need your notes or tape recorded interviews or any other pertinent reference material.

7. At the bottom of each typewritten page write "more." On the last page write "end" or "-30-". (### is also used.)

NOW YOU ARE READY TO BEGIN WRITING THE STORY

After you have interviewed people concerning an event or incident, you now have the facts, possibly scrawled in haste.

Look over your notes and decide what is the most important item, what really makes the story newsworthy. That one fact forms the heart of your lead. All other information is secondary.

Finding the lead is often a difficult process. In fact, it is one of the most difficult steps in news writing.

Why?

First, you must be objective and select the most important fact. Then you support your story with facts from your list that work in tandem with the major fact you selected. You have now established a "point of view" so you actually cease being objective. You may even discard some facts that do not support the lead you have chosen. Do not try to cram every fact into your story. Only use information that answers the readers' questions and makes an interesting and informative story.

THE LEAD

The key piece of information you have selected should be in your lead, preferably in the first paragraph of the news story. The lead should catch your reader's attention and make him want to read on.

Writing the news story is like telling a friend a bit of news.

You don't walk up to him and say that yesterday afternoon at approximately 2:30 P.M. an unidentified man was spotted running in a northeasterly direction after placing a shot with a high powered rifle from a bell tower and that the shot hit the President of the United States who was traveling in a motorcar and the President finally succumbed several hours later.

You say "The President was assassinated!" Or you say "An assassin killed the President!"

In other words, you come directly to the point in your conversation. So it is with the news story. Come to the point in the first sentence or certainly in your first or second paragraph.

TYPES OF LEADS

(List in student manual only.)

1. News Summary Lead
2. Direct Quotation Lead
3. Simple Statement
4. Striking Statement
5. Dialogue Lead
6. Narrative Lead
7. Descriptive Lead
8. Question Lead
9. Direct Address Lead
10. First Person Lead
11. Contrast or Comparison Lead
12. Variations of the Summary Lead
    a. Punch Lead
    b. Tabular Lead
    c. Crowded Lead
    d. Shirt-Tail Lead
    e. Cartridge Lead
13. Hybrid or Eclectic Lead

14. Structured Leads
    a. Staccato Lead
    b. Prefa[illegible] Lead
    c. Conditiona[illegible] Clause Lead
    d. Substantive Clause Lead
15. Special Categories of Leads
    a. Literary Allusion Lead
    b. Familiar Saying Lead
    c. Parody Lead
    d. Colon Lead
16. Leads that Editors Cannot Cut from the Bottom
    a. Upright Pyramid or Sequence Lead
    b. Cumulative Interest Lead
    c. Suspended Interest Lead

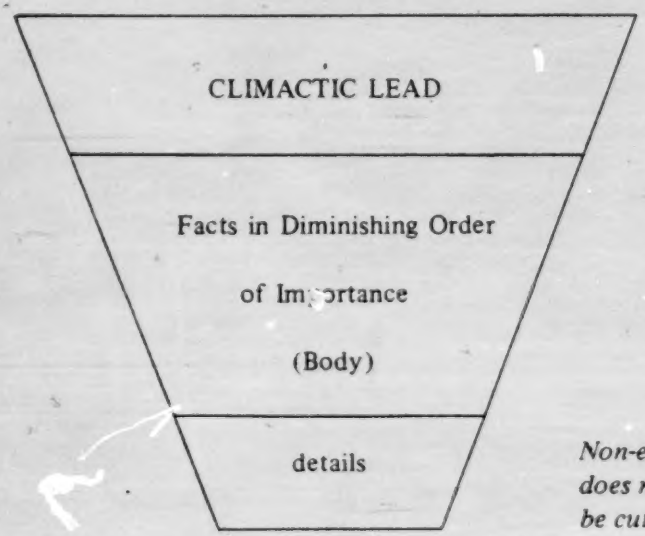
SOME BASICS

Let's digress here for a moment. Good news writing is terse, lean writing. Write short sentences and short paragraphs. It is quite common to have one sentence compose a paragraph when writing news copy -- quite the opposite of literary writing. Check your local newspaper and see what we mean.

Use simple words, identify individuals (even well-known people in your organization), cut out all words that are not necessary. Less copy is usually better than more.

After the lead is down on paper, each succeeding paragraph in the news story contains information of lesser importance so that an editor can cut from the bottom if a space limitation is encountered. This way if information you have typed must be eliminated, the least important information is deleted, saving the most important part (the lead) and the following few paragraphs.

This system is call the inverted pyramid style of newswriting. It can be diagrammed as follows:



Usually a one sentence paragraph, although the lead can run to three paragraphs.

Important information considered integral to the story.

Non-essential information. If space does not allow, portions of it may be cut.

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS

All writing – especially journalistic writing – has certain characteristics:

Your writing should be **correct**. The facts should be true and arranged properly. Names should be spelled correctly and all material should be verified prior to publication.

Your writing should be **clear**. In this case, clarity means using short words, short sentences and short paragraphs. Words should be familiar. Gobbledegook and jargon are out; technical words should be fully explained. One idea to a sentence is enough.

Your writing should be **coherent**. This necessitates planning. Sentences should be arranged so the flow will be orderly and the ideas follow in some sort of logical sequence. This helps your reader understand and digest your writing.

Your writing should be **concise**. Be ruthless. Cut out every word that isn't necessary. Generally it takes fewer words to tell about something in the active, rather than the passive, voice. Strong writers use lean prose and make every word count.

NEWS STORY ESSENTIALS

Earlier we skipped rapidly over the five W's and the H.

Let's spend a few minutes on them now.

Somewhere in your news story you must answer:

WHO - Who did the action in the story; who was involved? This also implies that you identify the who or whos in relation to your readers, their position in the organization, where they work, etc.

WHAT - What happened, what action took place? If this question is not answered rapidly the reader stops reading your story and goes to other material where he or she can get an answer.

WHERE - Where did the event take place? Pinpoint the location, country if important, city, state, etc. Or the company, hospital, office, construction site where the ceremony, indicent or whatever happened.

WHEN - Just when did the event take place: day, month, year, this week, this fiscal year, etc.? This is especially important in stories where it is unusual for the event to have happened at that time. Mr. Jones was working late taking inventory. He was leaving the store around midnight when he found a small boy imprisoned by two pieces of display furniture . . .

HOW - How did the event happen? How was the success accomplished? People are fascinated with the methods used to achieve something or the description of exactly how an event occurred.

WHY - Why did the event occur? Why did one individual do what he or she did? Direct quotes usually provide the best answer to this question, since it is often a subjective matter or one person's opinion. Have the person about whom the story is written speak for himself.

In addition to including this information in the first one or two paragraphs, your lead may also focus on one of them.

For example, in a WHAT lead you might begin: "Record earnings were posted this quarter for the XYZ manufacturing . . ."

WRITERS EVALUATE FACTS, SELECT LEADS TO FULFILL WRITING WORKSHOP ASSIGNMENT

Writers with the same information will handle news and feature stories quite differently. Experience of the writer is obviously a variable. But, other things being equal, handling of the bare facts changes radically from one writer to another.

Selection of the lead should be preceded with objectivity in the scanning of factual material. In the case of the Communiversity Writing Workshop, writers were urged to take a list of facts, objectively evaluate the potential lead, and then, since the writer had then established a point of view, support that lead with remaining facts at hand.

Here are the results of an exercise using an news story on equal rights in lending. (See back of your manual for the list of facts.)

Christine Carroll and her husband have tried five times in the last three years to get a loan for their dream house. Five times they have been turned down.

The $4,000 share Mrs. Carroll contributes to their yearly income of $16,500 doesn't count, say most banks, when assessing the Carrolls' ability to repay the loan.

—Roger A. Snow, Employee Information Supervisor, Public Service Indiana, Plainfield, Ind.

This lead introduces Mrs. Carroll and provides a person for the reader to identify with.

Women may be in for a better deal as Congress considers five bills to outlaw sex discrimination in lending.

Loan institutions have traditionally underated women as credit risks; in fact, a U. S. Savings and Loan League survey of 421 institutions found that 72% of them would ignore the wife's income in determining a family's credit level.

—Don Stewart, Editor, Imperial Tobacco Products, Ltd., Montreal, Quebec, Canada

Lead here focuses on key issue and supports it with other facts.

Credit is still hard to come by for women.

Even though 40% of wage earners are women, only the State of Washington has adopted a bill barring sex discrimination in lending. Four other states are considering similar legislation, and there are five bills before Congress that would outlaw discrimination.

—Jean Watson, Editor, Handy & Harman, Specialty Metals Group, Cockeysville, Maryland

Another summary lead that hits a key issue.

Women have come a long way, but apparently have a long way to go when it comes to borrowing money.

Christine Carroll, a New York bookkeeper earning $4,000 a year, and her husband, who earns $12,500, have had little luck (and little help) in obtaining a house loan.

—Craig Kuhl, Public Relations, TRW Systems, Redondo Beach, Calif.

Obvious questions must be answered, but there is no necessity to answer all 5 W's and H in the lead.

A Floral Park, New York, couple's futile efforts to obtain a home loan is focusing attention on the question of whether U. S. lending institutions discriminate against women.

Mr. and Mrs. Frank Carroll have a combined yearly income of $ 16,500; yet Mrs. Carroll's $4,000 annual earnings are consistently ignored when the couple applies for credit. At least five lending institutions have refused the Carrolls' credit during the last three years.

—Camille Emig, Editor, Ralston Purina Company, St. Louis, Missouri

Good news lead that covers three of the questions. . . the who, where, what and also implies the when.

[The following editor took a different approach and wrote in Congresswoman Martha Griggin's newsletter to her constituents.]

Good writing is lean writing. Use adjectives sparingly.

Major banks and retail stores are consistently underating women as poor credit risks, according to an Oregon research report. Men and women of the same credit worthiness applied for a $600 auto loan in St. Paul, Minnesota, recently. Nine of the 23 banks gave preferential treatment to the men.

"The idea that women of child-bearing age are poor credit risks is a myth," Representative Griffin said. "Most women have control over whether they become pregnant."

There are presently five bills before Congress that would outlaw sexual discrimination in lending.

—Diane Hakimzadeh, Employee Benefits Assistant, U. S. Postal Service, Houston, Texas

Use short words, short sentences, short paragraphs and highly personal copy. Both Rudolph Flesch and David Ogilvy, as well as numerous other authors, recommend this.

The story of a New York couple may make it easier for women to secure loans without fear of being refused because of their sex.

—Roger W. Ross, Supervisor, Employee Communications, American Air Filter Company, Inc., Louisville, Kentucky

Nearly 40% of the wage earners in the United States have difficulty obtaining bank loans. These are not necessarily the unreliable, the chronic absentees or the high risk job employees. They are women.

—Sandra Coffey, Writer, Columbia Gulf Transmission Co., Houston, Texas

Let the facts tell the story. Let the reader reach his own conclusion on the basis of the facts you have presented.

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I. Get Rid of Gobbledegook

A. Cliches

1. Avoid stock phrases.
Example: We dedicated outselves to the task and searched far and wide for an agreement that was right beneath our noses.

B. Euphemisms

Avoid euphemisms for something more explicit.
Examples: underprivileged for poor; garden of memories for cemetery.

C. Pretentious Words

1. If the subject calls for big words that fit, there is nothing wrong with using them; however, don't overuse them.

2. When the author adds words just to impress the reader, there is danger of confusion.
Example: The black insistency of insidious consistency permeates the fetid atmosphere.

3. Some people feel Greek and Latin words are more "scientific" than Anglo-Saxon ones. So they prefer expedite, ameliorate, extraneous, and clandestine.

D. Jargon Words

1. Jargon words peculiar to a trade or profession sound like a foreign language to those who aren't on the "inside."

2. They are usually non-scientific terms. Examples: One-night stand, gig, printer's devil.

II. Avoid Abstractions

A. Be Specific

1. Allow the reader to almost see, hear, smell, or touch what you are writing by awakening his or her imagination.

2. Concrete words are remembered longer because of their emotional appeal.

3. Substitute exact words for abstractions.
Fair: I bought some food at the store.
Better: I bought a steak at the A & P.
Fair: The President discussed international problems.
Better: The President discussed the Arab-Israeli Peace Treaty.

4. Avoid abstract words

Instead of	Say
approximately	about
assist	help
ascertain	learn
advise	tell
demonstrate	show
employ, utilize	use
at this time	now

III. What to Cut

A. Useless Repetition

Examples: Each and every word is a jewel. It is a true fact. The modern woman of today is free.

B. Unnecessary Phrases

Examples: This was due to the fact they didn't know the issues. He came in contact with the hot wire. During the time he was in office, he said nothing.

C. Words Delaying the Main Idea

Examples: There is one game which he likes the best. Better: He likes one game best.

D. Extra Clauses

Example: Bill said he would tell me about the game, and he told me; but he forgot to tell me who won; and I forgot to ask.
Better: 1. Subordination: When Bill told me about the game, I forgot to ask the score.
2. Two sentences: Bill told me about the game. I forgot to ask the score.
3. Compound predicates: Bill told me about the game and didn't mention the score.

IV. Avoid the Weak Passive

A. The Passive Voice Confuses

There is nothing wrong with using the passive verb, but overuse may create vagueness. It is difficult to know who is doing what when the passive is used.

B. The Active Voice is Clearer

When a writer uses the passive voice, the subject of the sentence is acted upon instead of acting.
Examples: Passive: The report was written by the manager.
Active: The manager wrote the report.

V. Parallelism

Parallel ideas should be expressed in the same word forms.

Examples: Poor: I prefer to read, swimming, or to watch football.

Better: I prefer to read, to swim, or to watch football.

Or: I prefer reading, swimming, or watching football.

THE FEATURE STORY

We have just been talking about the news story. Many people call it the straight news story. New we are going to discuss feature or human interest news.

A feature story can range from a review of the hobbies or activities of a particular individual or group to a detailed story about the quality or reliability program in a company plant.

You can also featurize a news story. This is especially true of most news stories in organizational publications or small-town publications or neighborhood publicationsl due to bi-weekly, monthly, bi-monthly, or quarterly frequency of publication.

A feature story is not an immediate as a straight news story. It is the type of story that wouldn't hurt if you held it over for your next issue because the facts and story would still apply. Delay in publication would not negate the justification for publishing it in the first place.

The news story must be printed before it gets cold . . . before it is old.

HOW DO YOU WRITE A FEATURE STORY?

You start much the same way for the feature as you do with the news story. You get a tip from someone or smell out a story yourself and start tracking down people to interview and gather all possible information.

Then you write down their comments and list facts that are important. Back at your desk you look over the material from your interview and again pick the angle, something to hang your story on, the peg.

There must be newsworthiness in a feature story as well as in a news story. An editor of a city newspaper might ask you if you have a special angle if you were discussing a possible feature with him or her.

The angle is the paste to glue to rest of your story together. Without it you will have a mediocre feature which may not even rate high as a story.

With the feature story, gathering facts is quite important. You must collect more information than you actually need for two reasons:

1. To get a better feel for the story.

2. To allow you to prune those select facts that are the most stimulating and interesting to your potential readers.

Just because the story is a feature and not hard news doesn't mean your facts need be less accurate. Allow them to tell the story and let the reader reach his or her own conclusion from them. Do not succumb to the temptation to editorialize and give your opinion as many feature writers do. You can give your opinion when you label it as such in an editorial, but a feature must present facts that allow the reader to come to his or her own decision regarding an evaluation or conclusion, if one is warranted.

KINDS OF FEATURES

Usually the feature centers around some emotion and for this reason it is often called a human interest story.

Two of the more popular feature types are the interesting person narrative and the human-interest sketch. They deal largely with one individual and his exploits, feelings, or adventures.

Interpretative features are quite popular in organization publications. This is the feature that hopes to inform, instruct, describe, or give the background to a complicated problem.

Some examples are: "The pollution problem . . . and what XYZ Company is doing about it." "Why ABC Retail Chain is not able to raise wages this year." Other suggestions include using the interpretative feature as an explanation of a new process or technique developed by your department, agency, etc.

Historical features, how-to-articles, and simplified technical or scientific articles are also types of this feature.

FEATURE CATEGORIES

The feature is difficult to categorize. Few journalists agree to any standards. There are a few characteristics that do apply. First, the feature is not fiction, but a non-fiction article tailored for maximum audience consumption. Second, features are timeless. They should be as good next week as they are today. Finally, they are only as good as the creativity of the writer in arranging the facts in the most interesting manner possible.

The feature can be a:

1. Profile

   a. The well-known person.

   b. The little-known person.

   Both can be interesting. Naturally the profile of the famous person has more immediate general interest whereas the profile of the little-known individual must stress accomplishments, interesting experiences, unusual occurrences to garner reader interest. But the feature on the unknown individual can be interesting even without all of the preceding...it depends again on the creativity of the author to make the person interesting, warm, and human.

2. Places

3. Historical

4. Occupations

   The above three categories are almost self-explanatory. The unusual is more interesting in all of them, but a mere chronology, properly worded and structured can be extremely interesting to a reader.

5. Stunts

The stunt feature must tie the event (often staged) into the purpose that the stunt was designed to emphasize. The writer must be careful to make the transition between the two smoothly and logically.

6. The "Precede"

This is a behind-the-scenes piece designed to alert the reader to an upcoming event, change in the law, or future program.

7. Pets; Calendar Events; Hobbies

8. The Technical

This feature explains--in layman's language--recent advances, changes in procedures, changes in laws, advances in medicine, electronics, mechanics.

9. People: Young or Old

Both ends of the spectrum are especially interesting; of course, all people stories can be interesting.

10. Education

More and more people are attending schools or advanced education of one sort. Features on this subject are especially relevant.

THE FEATURE ENDS DIFFERENTLY FROM THE NEWS STORY

One of the major differences between the feature and the news story is that the feature allows greater latitude in the selection of your lead. It also allows you to inject greater variety into the lead.

One of the ways to begin a feature or featurized news story is to begin with a quotation from a person that will attract the reader. After all that is the major purpose of the lead: to grab and interest the reader as well as to inform. Then you follow the quotation with information about **who** the speaker is, **what** kind of expert he or she is, **where** the speech took place and other pertinent facts usually interlaced with more quotes.

A feature may also begin with the description of a particular incident and follow with its relation to a greater story that will follow.

As previously mentioned, the question lead is another way to begin a feature. Others are the news summary lead, the analogy lead, the contrast lead, and the picture lead where a scene is first described to set the stage for a story. Here the **where** becomes very important.

HOW THE FEATURE IS DIFFERENT

While the news story is structured from top to bottom with each succeeding paragraph having information of lesser importance, the conclusion of the feature is similar to literary writing. There is a definite conclusion as in narrative or expository writing, a climax or highest point of interest. In the news story the climax is in the lead. In the feature this climax is at the end and can be a flashback to the lead, a condensed summary of the entire feature, or certain facts previously mentioned in the story.

WRITING THE FEATURE

With the emphasis still on leads, Communiversity Writing Workshop students were given another list of facts for a story assignment.

This time the topic was "Profits" and the specific assignment: write a feature story. (See list of facts at the back of your manual.)

What does the Virginia Credit Union League (VCUL), a non-profit organization, have in common with Bethlehem Steel?

A public which can affect its future.

It is a fact that Bethlehem Steel earned between 3% and 4.3% profit on sales in the 1970-72 period. But the public doesn't know that. The public, according to a recent Opinion Research Corp. survey, thinks Bethlehem and other large industries earn 28% on the dollar.

"Public opinion is important," Gene Farley, Managing Director of the VCUL told the members at the convention, "because legislation follows opinion and uninformed opinion can lead to bad legislation. It is up to Bethlehem and big business in general to get the facts to the public or they will suffer from bad legislation in the future."

—Jack E. O'Connor, Editor, Virginia Credit Union League, Virginia Beach, Virginia

Good contrast lead. Author took a provided fact and contrasted it with his own organization.

How much profit is justified?

Banks have traditionally faced complaints against high interest rates charged to their customers. However, Commercial Trust employees may take some consolation in recently published opinions regarding their manufacturing counterparts.

According to a recent survey by the Opinion Research Corp. of Princeton, N. J., many Americans believe that manufacturers are making 28 cents on every sales dollar—contrary to the actual figure of 4.2 cents.

—Peggy Duggan, Editor, Union Planters National Bank, Memphis, Tennessee

A good short lead sentence is often the best lead for a feature, especially if it is a teaser or a question lead as in this case.

A national study by the Opinion Research Corp. of Princeton, N. J., has revealed that a majority of Americans believe U. S. companies are reaping high and unfair business profits.

Dr. George S. Cummings, dean of the College of Business at the University of Striker, today expressed concern over the report because, as he put in, "Poorly informed opinion can lead to unreasonable control and restraints by government."

—Ray Haeckel, News Manager, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah

A newsy lead that answers most of the 5 W's and H introduces this feature story.

What would you estimate Blaine Supermarkets' profits, on the sales dollar, were for the fiscal period ended 1 June? If you are the average American, according to a recent survey, you would estimate 28 cents on the dollar. If the company were a manufacturing concern rather than retail, 1972 profits would be 4.2 cents on the dollar, well below the estimated 28 cents.

Profits for Blaine were, in fact, 3/4 cent on the dollar.

Many writers feel that the lead is worth 50% of their time since it will trap or lure the reader into the body of the story.

"It's important that Blaine employees know exactly what the profit picture actually is," said George Emery, Vice President, Finance.

"Everyone seems to think that the food business is a highly profitable one, particularly with today's high food prices," he said.

Good quotes can make a story. They usually provide an excellent lead when the quote is dramatic.

—Marie Sandvik, Manager, Communications, Red Owl Stores, Inc., Minneapolis, Minnesota

"Profits are essential to the very existence of American business, particularly the Werner Wiener Work," WWW President Otto Werner said at the June 4 dedication of a new plant in Nashville.

—Terry Fisher, Communications Editor, Oscar Mayer & Co., Madison, Wisconsin

Features, especially human interest stories, have several principles that writers often ignore:

Many Americans believe after—tax profits of manufacturers to be over six times higher than they actually are. A major cause of this gap between fact and fiction is the public's lack of knowledge about . . .

—Alane G. Williamson, Communications Assistant, Exxon Chemical USA, Houston, Texas

Do not change facts to make a better story.

Profits!

The one word that symbolizes a long history of motivation for the American free enterprise system now conjures up a negative image in many peoples minds.

Let details and facts tell the story. Understatement will allow the reader to reach his own conclusions and therefore intensify the story impact.

"We are operating in a very hostile climate," Alvin W. Vegtle, Jr., president of the Eastern Company said. "Most of the alienation. . ."

—W. F. Taft, Publications Supervisor, Southern Services, Inc., Atlanta, Ga.

Many Americans believe United States corporations make 28 cents profit on every dollar of sales.

That startling conclusion was revealed in a 1971 opinion survey conducted by Opinion Research Corporation of Princeton, N. J.

Stay out of the story. Let speakers talk for themselves and if possible in their own language.

The facts are, according to the 1972 U.S. Statiscal Abstract, that last year U. S. manufacturers netted only 4.2% profit on each sales dollar.

— Dean English, Supervisor of Employee Publications, Firestone Tire & Rubber Company, Akron, Ohio

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BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

Getting the story is one of your biggest problems. Without good tips, an active inquiring mind, and proper planning you won't be able to develop good stories.

Even with these pre-requisites you need some way to get the specific facts you want.

The interview is the most important method you have for getting information you need for news and feature stories.

An effective interview with an interesting, talkative person can make a great story. An effective interview with a closed mouth individual can still give you a good story.

How can you interview successfully?

First, you can't be shy. You must be aggressive, without being offensive, and not just ask questions.

They key is asking the right questions. This may sound basic and it is. But to ask the right questions you have to have done your homework. Research the interviewee as thoroughly as possible within your time limitations. It is important to be able to intelligently ask questions once your interview is arranged.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

Approach your subject with probing questions. Questions which need more than a simple Yes or No for an answer. Such as How is this accomplished? Just what motivates you to devote much of your valuable time to taking care of mentally retarded children? Tell me more about yourself...anything you feel is important that perhaps we haven't covered.

Keep your interview moving with conversation, not voicing opinions, but relaxing the individual with comments and questions from a list you have prepared in advance. Make sure that the person being interviewed feels what he or she has done is significant and that you are interested.

Your conversation should reflect that interest as well as respect for the job that individual performs.

If there is something you do not understand as the interviewee talks, ask. Don't wait. You may have to check back with the individual for clarification or additional information, but avoid it, if possible. Try to get all you need at one time.

Don't push a point when a person has refused to answer. Instead, go on to something else; try rephrasing the question later in the interview if you feel you need that answer. Also, use common sense on questions that have obvious answers.

There are still people who insist on asking a woman who has just lost her three children in a fire, "How do you feel about your loss?"

Not only should the answer be obvious, but the question is uncalled for. No story is <u>that</u> important. Remember you have a responsibility to the individual not to make him or her look silly or ignorant.

Finally, be a good listener!

INPORTANT POINTS TO KEEP IN MIND

1. Read articles on the subject you will cover. Never enter an interview completely ignorant.

2. Plan your questions in advance and write them down.

3. Look for the essential elements of information: the who, what, where, when, why, and how.

But you also want something that is different or unusual. Something that may not be obvious. You can dig up a new angle in the interview if you have prepared properly.

4. Speak the interviewee's language. Don't confuse him with ten dollar words. (Incidentally your writing should reflect this too.) Simple, easily understood words are far better than complicated or little used ones.

5. Be honest and don't say something to the interviewee you do not mean. Save questions that are likely to antagonize him or her until the end of the interview.

6. Don't tell your interviewee you will get the story printed. You have little control over this. You may not be able to get it cleared, or you may have to substitute some other story, or drop it entirely.

7. Accept facts with ease. Don't be shocked if fantastic facts come out of the interview. Be prepared to check these facts, but do not let your feelings show strong emotion. Don't say, "I don't believe you." If you question the validity

of a statement, use caution and ask how the interviewee arrived at that conclusion or how that fact was determined, etc.

Dig deep to find what makes the person tick. If you can find what unlocks the individual's willingness to share his thoughts, opinions, experiences or attitudes--a wealth of interesting copy will be the result.

On the following pages are some ways to succeed at interviewing. Some are things to do, and others things to avoid.

An excellent book entitled Keys to Successful Interviewing by Stewart Harral is the basis for these suggestions, some of which reemphasize just what we've been discussing.

Here are the high points:

1. Make a positive first impression, one you have planned. Be relaxed yourself so you can relax the interviewee. Advance preparation helps you as the interviewer feel confident in your role and also gives the interviewee the impression you know exactly what you're doing. In turn, the interviewee feels confident that what he's telling you is important.

2. Be sincere; don't smile if you don't see humor. Don't laugh if you're just trying to relax the interviewee. Watch what you say. Make sure there can be no mistake. You do not want your interviewee to misunderstand your intentions or the information you seek.

3. Explain as thoroughly as possible to your interviewee why you need the information he or she has. Impress the importance of this interview on your subject. After all you are taking valuable time; it should be necessary.

4. Make sure the interviewee is center stage. You should put yourself in the background.

5. Take notes, but maintain eye contact as much as you can. Here a tape recorder is helpful.

6. There are times when tape recorders tend to make certain people nervous. When this happens fuss over it and call the recorder names. Explain that you really don't understand all there is to know about such gadgets, but that they sure help you to concentrate on the conversation since you don't have to take notes. Say, "I prefer to use a recorder rather than take notes in longhand so I can concentrate more on what you're saying." Naturally, if the interviewee objects, shut off the machine. Never, under any circumstances, record without an individual's knowledge. Yes, you can use a recorder on a phone interview, but you must have an audible beeper the interviewee can hear.

7. Do not confuse the interviewee. If he or she acts confused, explain what you are attempting to do.

8. If the interviewee becomes antagonistic, keep your cool. Remember he or she is doing you the favor in granting time for the interview.

9. Often the interviewee will be interrupted by phone calls or people sticking their head inside the office. If possible, try to get the interviewee away from the usual environment if there are numerous distractions, thus cutting down interruptions. Go out in the hall and interview while you are walking somewhere else if necessary. Use a conference room or some other secluded spot if available.

10. Or use the phone. You can get a great deal of information during a telephone interview, although you get no first-hand impression of your interviewee.

11. Nevertheless phone calls can take precedence to personal visits. When your interviewee is busy and a personal visit is impossible, get your information on the phone. Remember too that you are less likely to be interrupted during a phone conversation than you are during a personal visit to someone's office.

If ever you are tempted to use pressure, change your tactics or rephrase a question. Save the tough questions that are likely to draw a harsh retort or no answer until near the end of your interview.

Study successful interviewers such as Barbara Walters, Walter Cronkite, and Harry Reasoner.

CUTLINES . . . YOU CALL THEM CAPTIONS

An important point to remember about cutlines, or captions as they are often called, is that they will usually be read before stories. In fact, the readership of the cutline is generally greater than that of the story, no matter how well-written your story is.

It is human nature to look at pictures and captions before reading the accompanying story. Art or photos always attract the reader's attention before body type.

Why?

For a long time we thought it was because people were in a hurry and had little time to read all stories. While this is true, it is basically because the reader is lazy.

Since captions are shorter than the story itself, the reader attains a sense of satisfaction from having completed the reading of a caption with quite a bit less effort than struggling with a story.

This does not mean that you should give up writing the story. It does mean that your cutlines should be well-written, identifying the people in the picture and telling their own story and that you should consider photos and captions for maximum audience impact.

If a story accompanies the photo or art, the caption should interest the reader to delve into that story. It helps if the photo shows activity described farther into the story than the first two or three lead paragraphs.

Make your captions short. A caption should never run more than half the depth of the picture. Even that is far too long, but is sometimes necessary to identify all the persons in a particular picture.

In other words, if you have a picture that is three inches in depth, the caption should not be more than one and a half inches deep.

Your caption should also be accurate. Do not promise something in the caption that does not appear in the photo or story that follows.

When identifying people, you must say something like the following: (From left to right) . . . then list names, titles, etc. Or: Jill Jones (left) . . .

Don't expect the reader to be able to identify the correct person in the photograph even if he is a prominent administrator, organization president or television personality.

Pin down whom you identify in the photograph by physical location, job title or department. Remember the reader cannot tell what the person does or what his significance is merely by his or her name. More information is required. Give it to the reader.

THE PURPOSE OF HEADLINES

How do you lead a person into a story? How do you entice him or her to read something you have spent a great deal of time preparing? Headlines are the answer.

Headlines are not the same as a lead to a story. Rather they serve to lure or trap the reader into the lead paragraph. After reading your headlines, a reader should be excited. He or she should want to get into the story immediately to find out more.

You should always be honest in a headline. Don't promise something that isn't there. If you say, "Miller Shoots Rapids" in your headlines, the story should not be about fishing.

Headlines are usually set in large or display type. A headline dresses up the page as well as gives the reader the gist or main point of the story at a glance.

So what have we seen about headlines so far? They are the advertisement which coaxes your readers to spend more time with your body copy. Perhaps they summarize the story and, it is hoped, beautify the page by breaking up body type, preventing monotony.

Needless to say, you must be brief when you write the head. It calls for condensing thoughts into a few meaningful words that have impact.

HEADLINE GUIDELINES

Headlines should have the following characteristics:

1. They should be active rather than passive. Use the active voice. Say Smith Wins Championship; not Championship Was Won by Smith.

2. Heads should be in the present tense; that is, the historical present or the future tense. Example: Club Tours New Plant...not Club Toured New Plant.

3. They must contain a verb, at the very least an implied or understood verb.

Headlines without verbs are merely titles. In newspapers and most newsletters this is verboten; although in magazines titles are often permitted, they are not as good as a headline that at least implies action. Say Ten Employees Retire rather than just Retirements.

4. Avoid starting headline with the verb.

5. Try not to repeat a word in the headline. The fewer words the better. On the other hand you do not want to mislead.

6. Tell the story accurately. Nothing is worse than a headline that implies something other than what follows in the accompanying story.

7. Attempt to reflect the general tone of the story. Don't write a light and breezy head for a story that is very serious and thought provoking.

8. Avoid abbreviations. Only widely known abbreviations should ever be used.

9. Do not use articles: an, a, the, at, of. It is not wrong, but the head will usually read better without them.

People have accepted the fact that a headline is not like a sentence with all the required punctuation, articles and adjectives.

10. Select a style and stick to it. For example, if only the first word of the headline is capped except for proper nouns, do not violate this style. If each word is capped except for necessary articles, then follow that style. All cap heads are much harder to read than upper and lower case heads, regardless of the typeface you select.

11. Each line of a headline should make sense. Do not split a phrase between the first and second lines or decks of a headline. The reader looks at the headline line for line, not as a whole, except when the headline is only one line or deck. A headline reading

New Bonus Policy
Helps Recruitment

should not be split to read

New Bonus
Policy Helps Recruitment

12. Check heads for mechanical and typographic correctness. Remember the headline will be the most noticeable item on your page other than a large dramatic picture. If there is an error it will have a negative impression on your reader and your publication will suffer.

13. Don't always use the first head you write and don't use the headline that fits better. Of course, the headline must fit, but if it is shorter than the full space allowed, use it.

Many of these rules, except the third and sixth, can be set aside in certain instances. But they are good guidelines to follow.

I also urge you to read Headlines and Deadlines by Bernstein and Garst (See Bibliography).

A LAST WORD

Editors have a habit of judging a news story by its temperature. This is a 'hot' story and that is 'cold' now. A 'hot' story is an extremely interesting and recent story. The more people it interests the 'hotter' it is.

You won't always have a hot story, but when you do the sooner you get it published the better.

Remember your readers are primarily interested in what happens close to them first. Don't play up a national story that has little proximate interest over a good story of local interest about local people and local events. Of course, you can develop a local tie-in to the big picture. This is the best way to run any story you might write.

For example, if you feel it is important to write a story on economic conditions, get local peoples' views and quotes to make your readers get the added impact of local developments or opinions of the otherwise distant events.

AP STYLE GUIDE EXERCISE

1. Write the correct version of (per cent percent) _____

2. In this sentence where 30 words are used numbers under ten are written out and numbers over 10 are arabic. (Such as 23 or 40 instead of twenty-three or forty.) Underscore correct usage according to AP Style Guide.

3. Is judgment spelled this way? Perhaps judgement is spelled this way? Underscore correct version.

4. Can you write that someone was mad at someone?
   yes_____ no_____

5. Most style guides call for the series comma to be used before the last item as in: red, white, and blue. The AP Style Guide says that it is not to be used as in: 9, 10 and 11.
   True_____ False_____

6. Titles that follow the name of the individual as in: Mary Johston, Training Specialist, are always capitalized?
   True_____ False_____

7. Would you capitalize anything other than the first word of the following sentence? He was an advocate of social security for old age.
   yes_____ no_____
   If yes, what_____

8. When the word commission stands alone in a sentence it should not be capped even if it refers to the Civil Service Commission.
yes_____ no_____

9. Which of the following would you abbreviate:

a. Street	d. Boulevard	g. Terrace
b. Road	e. Place	h. Oval
c. Avenue	f. Drive	i. Plaza

10. Can you abbreviate March or April?
yes_____ no_____

11. Is this correct? (Oct. 28, 1976)
yes_____ no_____

12. Journalism he said is a rewarding but exacting field.
Does this sentence need commas?
yes_____ no_____
If yes, where? (Mark)

13. How are the following words spelled? If correct mark okay.
a. employe _____
b. falout _____
c. hitchhiker _____
d. accomodate _____
e. adviser _____
f. skillful _____
g. subpoena _____

14. Can you say, "This is a new record!" (referring to the setting of a record--milestone)
yes_____ no_____

NEWS STORY - WOMEN'S RIGHTS

1. Women at the same or comparable jobs earn less, by at least 5-10%, than men.

2. Christine Carroll, 32, Floral Park, New York, earns $4,000 of the Carrolls' combined income of $16,500.

3. For three years she has been turned down for a mortgage by lending institutions (more than five).

4. Granting of credit is discriminatory against women in the United States.

5. Thomas Hayne, Senior Vice-President at Chase Manhattan Bank, saw the Carrolls on television. He wrote them saying, "It has been the Chase's policy to take into account the total family income in determining a family's ability to borrow."

6. Earlier, however, the Chase was one of the several institutions which turned down the Carrolls.

7. There are currently five bills before Congress that would outlaw sex discrimination in lending.

8. The State of Washington has already adopted a bill banning sex discrimination in lending. Four other states are considering similar legislation.

9. Oregon's major banks and retail stores were accused of consistently underrating women as credit risks by a published 74-page study.

10. A U.S. Savings and Loan League surveyed 421 member institutions and found that 72% of them would ignore the wife's income when making a decision to grant a loan.

11. In St. Paul, Minnesota, a man and a woman of the same credit worthiness applied for $600 as an auto loan. Nine of the 23 banks gave preferential treatment to the man.

12. Nearly 40% of all wage earners are women.

13. Mrs. Carroll is infertile.

14. Martha Griffiths, Michigan Democratic Representative, said, "The idea that wives of childbearing age are unreliable borrowers is a myth. Most women have control over whether they will become pregnant."

15. Women are transients in the work force, according to various lenders.

16. Most state laws are vague about women's responsibility toward their debts.

17. Credit ratings of women are often eliminated when they marry, are divorced, or widowed.

18. New York City's First National Bank accepts alimony and welfare income as proof of ability to repay a loan.

19. Mrs. Carroll is a bookkeeper employed steadily for 10 years.

FEATURE STORY - PROFITS

1. Figures in the 1972 Statistical Abstract of the United States concerning an average U.S. manufacturing corporation state manufacturers net only 4.2¢ on $1.00 of sales after taxes.

2. Many Americans believe the after tax profit of manufacturers is 28¢ on $1.00 of sales.

3. Opinion surveys on profits were conducted in 1971 by the Opinion Research Corporation, Princeton, N. J.

4. 1970 - Bethlehem Steel's net income was 3% of revenue; in 1971, it was 4.7%; in 1972, it was 4.3%.

5. Unions want profits frozen or they will not be content with the wage guidelines.

6. Business must invest hundreds of millions to maintain, modernize and expand its facilities.

7. Millions must be spent on environmental controls.

8. To cut off or restrict the flow of profits is to knowingly risk the health and perhaps the very existence of American business. (Opinion)

9. Opinion is important. Legislation follows opinion. An uniformed opinion can lead to bad legislation.,

10. A poorly informed opinion can lead to unreasonable controls and restraints by government.

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